



The White Moor As Willing Executioner
By Phyllis Chesler and Nancy Kobrin
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On November 9, Muriel Degauque, a Caucasian Belgium-born woman, blew herself up in a failed attempt to kill American troops in Iraq. She is said to be the first European-born woman to die on a jihadist suicide mission. Degauque was also a "White Moor," a convert to Islam. Her husband, Isam Gorris, was a Belgian of Moroccan descent and he died the same day in a separate terrorist attack against Americans in Iraq. Degauque was a convert with a vengeance: She wore a head-to-toe chador, refused to eat with her father, and refused to allow her parents to watch television or drink beer in her presence.

An increasing number of Western men and women have converted to Islam. According to one report cited in an article by Ian Johnson in the Wall Street Journal, in the year after the 9/11 attacks, 71, 000 Germans had converted to Islam. If this number is correct, we might be looking at what people do when they are afraid or when they want to be on the "winning side." According to Osama bin Laden, people everywhere identify with the "strong" or "winning" horse. According to prison psychiatrist, Theodore Dalrymple, who has worked with Muslim prisoners in Britain, "a large part of the attraction of Islam to increasingly and essentially secularized men" is the opportunity Islam allows for the "abominable abuse of women."

Thus, according to Dalrymple, those western men who feel insecure or humiliated by the growing equality of women are attracted to Islam in the same way that western men are attracted to Asian mail-order brides. Of course, some men also convert in a search for God and for a spiritually vigorous community. In an article about why Islam attracts so many western criminals [there are many "jail house" conversions taking place], Dr. Monika Wohlrab-Sahr suggests that such people's "lives have spun out of control," and they are now "in search of structure."

Another reason for conversion to Islam involves the existence of white racism in the West. Indeed, a terrorist cell in Portland, Oregon, included several African-American converts. One woman, October Dominique Lewis, was also known as "Khadija." October ironically took her new Islamic name after the Prophet Muhammad's first wife, who was the first convert to the Prophet Mohammed's new religion.

Some African-Americans, and African-Caribbean Europeans have converted to Islam in the misguided belief that Islam is color-blind (it is not, look at what is happening in the Sudan) and/or has no history of slavery. In fact, both ethnic Arab Muslims and African Muslims practice slavery today.

So far, only a handful of western converts have been revealed as jihadi warriors. For example, Britain's Richard Reid, the infamous "shoe bomber," (whose father is also a convert to Islam); Poland and Germany's Christian Ganczarski, who is being held in France for his involvement in al-Qaeda; America's John Walker Lindh, who fought in Afghanistan and who was captured and sentenced to jail; America's Jose Padilla who is now on trial for planning a terrorist attack.

Western women usually convert when they marry Muslim men--they are pressured to do so. Such women are often naive and quite romantic about the "exotic" other. Some may have been traumatized by abusive or emotionally distant families and seek "new lives" in unfamiliar settings. However, they soon find themselves in eerily similar and more dangerous circumstances. Perhaps like some of their male counterparts, western female converts to Islam also have out-of-control lives that they are trying to rescue or redeem. Muriel Degauque had wrestled with alcohol and drugs when she was a teenager.

In 2004, Pope John Paul warned Catholic women to "think hard before marrying a Muslim" and urged Muslims to "show more respect for human rights, gender equality, and democracy." Perhaps the Pope feared that Catholics might increasingly convert to Islam--but he may also have understood that a western wife who resists conversion may lose custody of her children, be shunned, divorced, or even murdered, not only in Europe but in America too. For example, in 2002, in New Jersey, a Muslim husband from Guyana, Ali Hassan, murdered his pregnant Hindu wife Marlyn, and both his mother-in-law, Bernadette Seajatan, and sister-in-law Sharon when Marlyn refused to convert to Islam.

While Muriel Degauque may indeed be the "first" Caucasian and European "shahida" or mujahidat (holy martyr), the fact that she is a woman is no longer that unique. Many women (mainly Muslim and Hindu) have been suicide killers. Like Degauque, some, especially among the Palestinians and the Chechens, in particular who are also known as "black widows" because they are presumably avenging brothers, fathers, or husbands who have killed and died in terrorist missions. Degauque was, after all, a widow who might indeed have been avenging her terrorist husband's death.

Although Degauque grew up in Belgium, she experienced the fate of girls in patriarchy which include feelings of unworthiness and guilt. In Degauque's case, a brother died

when he and she were both teenagers. According to a childhood neighbor, Andrea Dorane, "Muriel would tell me that it was she who should have died instead of her brother. Everyone had loved him."

Thus, the lesser-loved child may have harbored some "survivor guilt" which was exacerbated by the death of her husband. It should be recalled too that Al-Khansaa, yet another famous female convert to Islam, is venerated for her Arabic verse eulogizing her dead brothers, Sakhr and Muawiya. Al Qaeda named its first magazine for women after al-Khansaa as well. Could Muriel's martyrdom have been her attempt at "eulogizing" both her brother and her dead husband? Like many other female suicide killers, Degauque might also have been deeply depressed.

Finally, converts are often more zealous than those born into the religion. They need to prove themselves in order to be accepted. Therefore, in addition to the problems of second and third generation Muslims in Europe, we predict that an increasing number of western converts to Islam, both male and female, will also choose to become terrorists. While al-Qaeda and Palestinian serial killer masterminds do not hesitate to seduce or to force depressed or zealous women and men into blowing infidels up, it is important to understand that the western converts are also willing executioners.

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